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**Written testimony to the Michigan Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Michigan House Environmental Affairs Committee:**

Please consider my comment as you consider the effects of the legislation establishing "pilot areas" for beach maintenance activities.

The law has had very serious adverse effects in Grand Traverse Bay. In particular, the fragmentation of the coastal marsh at the south end of East Grand Traverse Bay demonstrated the folly of the law. This marsh is part of the 184-acre Traverse City wetland complex. This coastal marsh is now fragmented and seriously impaired in the misguided attempts to create sandy beaches where none have existed. The MDEQ Report on the Impacts of Beach Maintenance lays out the problems of the existing rules and suggests common sense recommendations for change.

The alteration and destruction of Great lakes coastal wetlands is a serious threat to the environmental integrity of our Great lakes. The Watershed Center has provided written comment in the recent past on the many adverse effects of this activity.

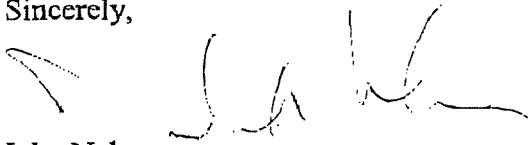
Our view is that each permit must be reviewed as a unique request. As Grand Traverse Baykeeper, I have walked and inventoried the shoreline of Grand Traverse Bay, as detailed in the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Protection Plan, appendix C. The shoreline is diverse in its character. Some of the stretches of beach are part of a greater wetland complex; others are primarily sand and stone beach. The adverse effects of grooming on each would be very different. Oversight by trained public officials is necessary to ensure the protection of the public's interest in state-owned bottomlands.

As a sixth generation riparian owner on Grand Traverse Bay, I have seen the natural cycles of lake levels and the changes of the natural shoreline due to water level fluctuation. The beach my family shares is one of some 2000 feet of a sandy cove protected by two stony points. With low water, emergent groundwater swale wetlands have developed. Half of this beach was "groomed" to destroy this natural beach and change the beach contour. When higher water levels inevitably return, we have no idea

what effect these changes will have on our natural beach and the area as a whole. Below the ordinary high water mark the land is a commons and cannot be changed without regard to the effects on the whole.

Please return to the common sense stewardship of the publicly held Great Lakes bottomlands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Nelson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Nelson  
Grand Traverse Baykeeper  
4022 Incochet Crest Commons  
Traverse City, MI 49684



# ALLIANCE FOR THE GREAT LAKES

Testimony of Cheryl Mendoza of the Alliance for the Great Lakes on Public Act 14  
before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs and House  
Committee on Natural Resources, Great Lakes, Land Use and Environment

Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
House Office Building, Room 519

Good afternoon. My name is Cheryl Mendoza and I am the Manager of Water Conservation Programs for the Alliance for The Great Lakes, the oldest Great Lakes citizens' organization. The Alliance has been actively involved in Great Lakes protection since its founding in 1970.

## **Our Great Lakes Coasts Are In Trouble**

The Great Lakes are a gift and it is our responsibility to protect them, particularly in Michigan as the heart of the Great Lakes basin.

The health of our Great Lakes is at a critical juncture. Last December a report endorsed by 60 of the top scientists from around the Great Lakes basin was released. The report stresses that "...additional actions are urgently needed to restore system elements, particularly in critical nearshore/tributary zones where a chain reaction of adaptive responses to a suite of stresses may be leading to catastrophic changes: ecosystem breakdown and potentially irreversible ecosystem collapse." Our best science suggests that parts of the Great Lakes are already at this tipping point.

Our nearshore and tributary zones – in other words, our coasts - are indisputably linked to the overall health of the Great Lakes. And our coasts are in trouble. In the past, healthy coasts reduced the impact of water pollution before entering the lakes. But the combined impact of stress from a variety of human-induced sources has overwhelmed the coast's ability to heal itself. 90% of the coastal wetlands along the Lake Huron/Lake Erie corridor have been destroyed.

## **Beach Grooming: Moving the Great Lakes Backwards**

We know the Great Lakes coasts are in crisis. We have research from 3 well respected scientists commissioned by the DEQ proving that beach grooming has substantial impacts to Great Lakes coastal areas and wetlands. Today, we are debating whether to allow the provisions of Public Act 14 to continue. It's clear that continuation of this authorization would deal a harsh blow to the Great Lakes' ability to heal itself.

The regeneration of vegetation during low water years is a normal component of wetland and near-shore ecology and is essential to healthy ecosystems in the long term. Coastal wetlands supply critical feeding and spawning habitat for native Great Lakes fishes as well as songbirds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. The coasts also provide habitat for 90% of the nearly 200 Great Lakes fish species and two dozen waterfowl species – which help fuel a two-billion dollar hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching industry. According to the Lake Michigan Lakewide Management Plan (U.S. EPA, April 2000), they support the greatest diversity and biological productivity of any ecosystem within the Basin.

Beach grooming, or more accurately put coastal clear-cutting, compounds and worsens existing problems with the Great Lakes including declining fish numbers, habitat loss, and increasing nutrient loading among other threats. The activities authorized by PA 14 result in:

- ◆ Fundamental changes to the chemical and physical conditions in coastal waters;
- ◆ Decreased success for juvenile game fish such as yellow perch, smallmouth bass, and largemouth bass;
- ◆ Lower numbers of adult fish in “groomed” areas;
- ◆ A 29% decrease of invertebrate communities that support sportfish ; and
- ◆ The expansion of invasive plant species.

These impacts extend over 150 feet on either side of a cleared area, causing damage to resources in front of adjacent property owners.

### **Michigan’s Role in Caring for the Great Lakes**

As citizens of “The Great Lakes State” many Michiganders are proud to be good stewards of the Great Lakes. To be clear, decisions made in regard to PA 14 will have a direct impact on the overall health of the Great Lakes. A simple, straightforward decision to sunset PA 14 will demonstrate good stewardship.

Coastal wetlands and habitat are one of Michigan’s most significant natural resources and they should be preserved for the benefit of the public. We encourage you to prevent destruction of our coastal areas that are held in trust for the people of the state by sunseting PA 14. Let this bad law die so our Great Lakes coasts can live.